DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 585 CE 085 523

AUTHOR	Jones, David
TITLE	Learning Culture.
PUB DATE	2001-06-00
NOTE	7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Adult Education Research Conference (42nd, Lansing, MI, June 1-3, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001jones.htm.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Education; Art Activities; *Art Education; Creative Activities; *Creativity; Cultural Activities; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Background; *Cultural Education; *Cultural Maintenance; Cultural Pluralism; Culture; Educational Research; Ethnicity; Foreign Countries; Identification (Psychology); Modernization; *Social Change; Social Class; Values
IDENTIFIERS	United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Adult and continuing education in the arts can and does play a role in the development of cultural identity. Dimensions of culture include ethnicity, location, age, social class, and time. This definition of culture leads to the conclusion that cultures are generally small and are dynamic rather than static. Research shows that individuals in what are perceived to be declining cultures learn about their culture from family and peers rather than educational establishments. They are often ambivalent about the value of their culture. Members of small cultural units take pride in their culture but are often frustrated by it and undervalue it. Adult education providers could do more to reinforce cultural identity. Many cultures see their future only in terms of preserving the past. Adult education must provide opportunities for cultural development through more creative studies that take traditional forms of expression but reinvent them for the twenty-first century. Preserving cultural identity is not about living in the past but about developing a new living cultural identity. Adult and continuing education can have a unique role in persuading ordinary people to learn about, value, and develop their own cultural identities outside of the value systems of the international art market. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 481 585

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Jones

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2001 AERC Proceedings

Learning Culture

David Jones
School of Continuing Education, University of Nottingham, England.

Abstract: This paper aims to develop a theoretical framework for analysing the ways in which adult education can contribute to the development of cultural values and cultural identity.

Introduction

This paper is about the role which adult and continuing education can and does play in the development of cultural identity. It begins with a detailed analysis of the nature of culture and concludes that cultures are generally small and are dynamic rather than static. After this, there is a section devoted to two research projects that examine the interface between education and culture. This discussion is extended to theorise about the role of adult education in reinforcing cultural identity and in contributing to the continuing dynamism of contemporary cultures.

Culture and the Arts

Much of what follows in this paper depends on how we choose to define culture. It is not an easy concept. The term is used in a range of ways that tend to confuse rather than elucidate meaning. For instance, we tend to speak of "European culture" or "American culture" and usually feel comfortable with this idea. We have a notion of what we mean by these terms. But if we then ask, what is it that all Europeans share or all Americans share, what have they in common, what are the characteristics and values that bind Europeans together or Americans together, then things begin to get a little tricky.

Raymond Williams (1983) acknowledged that 'culture' is one of the three most complicated words in the English language. He examines the etymology of the word and shows how it is used in a range of different ways. For our purposes we will confine ourselves to two of these usages. Williams refers to these as the "anthropological" and the "artistic" . In the first instance, "culture is used to refer to the beliefs and values, indeed, the whole way of life of a social group" (1986, p. 111).

In the second instance, the term is used to refer to what we conceive of as "the arts". I say, "what we conceive of as the arts"' since what we include in our concept of the arts is, itself, a social construct - our concept of the arts is culturally determined. Williams (1983) refers to the arts of music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film. This list represents the view from one particular cultural perspective. It is interesting that dance is not included. We know that in Russia and China they would include circus and acrobatics in their concept of the arts. In Europe, as well as in other countries, photography is now fully accepted as an art form. And I have not even mentioned those activities that

CE065523

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

are known in the UK as the crafts, but elsewhere might be considered as arts.The important thing to remember here is that "the arts" are part of that general definition of culture as "the whole way of life of a social group." Any culture constructs its own version of "the arts." What is included in the concept changes over time and from one country or region or community to the next. John Pick (1986) reminded us that,

> If we had created an Arts Council at the end of the Eighteenth century, it would have turned its attention to preserving the approved arts of gardening, sword fighting, needlework and dancing while letting such commonplace arts as novel-writing and drama fend for themselves on the commercial market. In like manner we might notice that the art of juggling is state-supported as high art in the Chinese People's Republic, and the arts of circus are state supported as high arts in the USSR (sic). In Britain we support neither (p. 11).

Note the reference here to "high art." This is what both Pick and Williams mean by the artistic sense of the term "culture." It is the "high arts" and not what we might refer to as the folk arts. It is high culture, not popular culture. Both authors were, of course, talking about the view from contemporary Britain in the 1980's. In popular discourse, the position has not changed all that much.

From the point of view of this paper, however, I want to extend Williams's definition. I will come back to the idea of culture soon, but for the moment, I want to make it clear that I see the concept of the arts as embracing all forms of benign creative expression. I include those activities we call crafts and I make no distinction between so-called "amateur" and "professional." I include in my concept of the arts all those activities that we might think of as the creative expressions of a culture. Hence I include folk songs as well as grand opera, folk dance as well as ballet, pottery and jewellery made by individuals (not mass produced). I include modern dance, ballroom dance and popular dance as well as dance from the traditional dance from ethnic communities.

If pushed I might also include interior decoration and garden design. I think that food has a good case for being included. But it must be remembered, when I am talking about the arts, I am talking about creation by individuals - not machines.

What of culture then? If we look at the way the term is used in both everyday language as well as in academic discourse, we might get some insights into how we can define the term.

What seems to distinguish one culture from the next is the pattern of beliefs, values and consequent behaviours it engenders. It is possible to identify shared values, beliefs and behaviours amongst groups of people and thereby to identify them as belonging to a particular culture. However, the bigger the group gets, the more difficult this seems to become. We have already spoken of the difficulty of identifying the characteristics of "European culture" or "American culture," for instance. It is no easier if we talk about British culture. It is still no easier if we talk about English, Irish, Welsh or Scottish culture.

Perhaps it will help if we look at what one might call the defining characteristics of a culture; if we try to identify the ways in which we distinguish one culture from the next. There is, normally, an ethnic dimension. Within Britain we can speak of Afro-Caribbean culture, Indian culture, Pakistani culture, Chinese culture, as well as English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish. This is but one dimension. This level of identification gives us a broad hint about the culture to which we are referring, but it is very crude. If we return to our question, What do all Afro-Caribbean people living in Britain share in terms of beliefs,

We can refine it further by looking at finer definitions of ethnicity and placing the culture in a geographical location. What do the members of the Bengali community in Birmingham have in common? What are the shared values of the Gujarati community in Bradford for example? Here we may be beginning to feel that we can get a handle on a particular recognisable culture.
But we know that within these cultures there is often a generation gap. Age is a factor. Age is another of those cultural distinguishing characteristics. We talk of youth culture or third age culture. We can refine our focus further, then, and identify the culture of Chinese teenagers in London, for instance.

Together with ethnicity, location and age, we can add social class. We speak of working class culture or middle class culture and these distinctions seem common to many ethnic groups. I don't want to critique the concept of social class in this paper but simply suggest that we do categorise people in terms of their perceived status.

So now we can identify working class Asian youth living in Birmingham and, perhaps, see them as belonging to a distinct culture with shared values, beliefs and behaviours. We have refined the focus even further and are in a better position to begin to examine what values and beliefs members of this group share.

Finally there is a temporal dimension. Working class Asian youth living in Birmingham in the year 2001 may not share the same values as working class Asian youth living in Birmingham in 1963, for instance. Times have changed. Behaviour, like culture, changes and develops.

This list is offered as a starting point. There may be other defining characteristics of a culture; religion for instance. I have not included it here because for me it seems to be closely bound up with ethnicity. What I wanted to do in the foregoing section is argue that when we refer to a culture, we are usually referring to quite a small unit if we are going to examine that concept in any meaningful way for educational purposes. I say "for educational purposes" because it is often the case that our definitions are instrumental: we define the subject of our discussion in a way that is suitable for our particular purpose. In certain circumstances, for instance, we might wish to include gender as a dimension. The

I want briefly to touch on the idea of multi-culturalism. To many people, a particular area or region will be seen to have a dominant culture with, maybe, other minority cultures living in the same are. However, the words "dominant" and "minority" are value laden and not helpful to this discussion. Whilst I accept that the words often accurately reflect the situation, especially the allocation of resources by governments, I prefer to see them as equally valued cultures living side by side. Throughout this paper I will try to avoid attributing superior status to one culture at the expense of another.

Culture and the Adult Curriculum

In this section I want to identify how adult education can influence the way in which we define our cultural identity. Norliza Rofli (2001), in a study currently being undertaken for a Ph.D., is examining the ways in which the different ethnic groups in Malaysia construct their cultural identity, particularly in relation to the arts, and is trying to identify the role which education plays in this. For this research she has defined adult education broadly to include educational activities undertaken by arts venues as well as that which is learned from family and peer groups. She has, to date, received 170 completed questionnaires from adults from different ethnic groups in Malaysia and has carried out a number of interviews.

Rofli has collected some valuable data but, since this research has not been published, I will have to discuss her findings in my words rather than hers. I do want to make the point strongly, however, that

this is her research and not mine.
The context here is one where the national government has developed a cultural policy aimed at promoting a national identity rather than that of the distinct and different ethnic groups that comprise the population. What she finds is that the majority of her respondents appear to value their ethnic culture greater than the national one being promoted centrally. They learn about this ethnic culture from family and friends rather than through formal adult education provision.

They say that they would value more adult education provision aimed at promoting their individual cultures. Whilst there is an interest among arts professionals in Western art, the majority of respondents were indifferent. When asked if they were more familiar with Western art forms, the majority of respondents said no. It seems, on my interpretation, that what is important to the respondents to the questionnaire is their own cultural identity rather than either the official cultural policy or developments in the West.

Here, I have only picked out a few of the issues Norliza is examining. I want to use this evidence to suggest that populations with strongly defined ethnic cultures tend to relate to those cultures rather than to ideas of culture promoted by a national government through formal education and through arts policy.

I am currently involved in an action research project in Sardinia. Sardinia is an autonomous region within Italy and is felt by its inhabitants to have its own distinct cultural identity. The aim of the project in which I am involved is to promote the economic development of a region in the interior of the island. The intention is to do this by encouraging study tours of adults to visit the region.

The local originators of the project have a vision that this will promote the area both economically and culturally. During the course of the project, however, we found that the local people were very ambivalent about their local culture. They were fiercely proud of their identity as Sardinian, rather than Italian, but at the same time despaired about the state of their island culture. Furthermore, one of the biggest problems that has been encountered by the project has been the need to persuade the locals that other people would be interested in their culture. They are both proud of it and undervalue it at the same time. They can't believe that anyone would be interested in them.

The role of adult education in this arena is a sensitive issue. There is a strong belief that promoting local culture means "heritage;" it is felt to be about preserving the past. However, cultures are dynamic, not static, and only survive if they can find an engine to promote that dynamism. It is a mistake to think of cultural education as being about preserving the past. It is more about developing into the future. It is about absorbing and using influences from outside, not rejecting them. If this course of action is dismissed by some cultural workers as cultural hybridisation, then so be it. Whilst I have heard both educationalists and cultural workers promote it, the idea of maintaining a *pure* culture cannot really be sustained. There is a sense in which all cultures, both contemporary and historic, are hybrids. In recent history it was the National Socialists under Hitler that sought to promote a pure Aryan culture. It was an experiment with dire consequences.

What seems to be needed is the development of a cultural dynamism alongside an identification and appreciation of cultural heritage. It is probably a truism to say that nowadays there are more ways of recording the present and the past than there have ever been. Much of the record can be stored digitally. We can access a description and images of the past at will. A continuing record of cultural history should be made, archived and made available to future generations. And remember, I am defining a culture as being a small unit - not a nation or state. We need many records made at the local level. Just like the teaching of history moved from the macro national perspective to the much smaller micro-perspective of local history, so also our view of culture should develop on similar lines. But, as I said earlier, this is only part of the story. What is important for any culture is to secure a future.

Tom Steele (1997) has recorded how adult educators in Britain challenged the idea that education in the arts was about inducting the next generation into a canon of great and good works of art and literature that should be known and appreciated by every educated person. This was exposed as the worst sort of cultural imperialism, though it is still central to many a national curriculum today. There is a need to broaden the cultural curriculum to include an analysis of art forms that are not thought, by an educated elite, to be what they choose to call 'classics'. We should value equally what was derisively called folk art. We should look at popular culture not just classical culture. But more than this, we should find ways of using adult education to develop our cultural identities.

For too long, the educational curriculum has been nervous about teaching people to be creative. But if we are to sustain the development of our many cultures, then we must find ways of moving them forward. Scotland is currently undergoing what has been called a cultural renaissance. Young painters and musicians have embraced the modern and found ways of expressing themselves that are definitely of the twenty first century but are also, distinctively and identifiably, Scottish. This represents another major role for adult educators; whether they are working within established institutions of adult education or in arts projects, museums, or galleries, they have a duty to provide the engine that will drive their many local cultures forward.

Summary

To summarise, then, the points I have tried to uncover.

The traditional curriculum of the educational establishment promoted the canon of great and good work. Adult and continuing education providers challenged this approach. In many areas the arts curriculum has developed from history or appreciation classes into "cultural studies."

Individuals in what are perceived to be declining cultures learn about their culture from family and peers rather than the educational establishment. They are often ambivalent about the value of their culture. Members of small cultural units take pride in their culture but are often frustrated by it and undervalue it. Adult education providers could do more to reinforce cultural identity.

Many cultures see their future only in terms of preserving the past. There is a need for adult education to provide opportunities for cultural development through more creative studies that take traditional forms of expression but reinvent them for the twenty first century. This may involve absorbing and responding to influences from other cultures but this contributes to a healthy dynamic. Preserving cultural identity is not about living in the past but about developing a new living cultural identity.
Adult and continuing education, free as it is from the value systems of the international art market, can have a unique role in persuading ordinary people to learn about, value, and develop their own cultural identities.

References:

Pick, J.(1986). *Managing the Arts? The British Experience.* London: Rhinegold.

Rofli, N. (2001). The perception and attitudes of Malaysians towards art and arts education. *Unpublished manuscript*

Steele, T. (1997). *The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945-65, Cultural politics, Adult Education and the English Question.* London: Lawrence and Wishart,

Williams, R. (1983). *Keywords.* London: Fontana.

Williams, R. (1986). *Culture.* London: Fontana.

[Home] [Search] [Conference Proceedings] [Back] [Top]

CE 025 513

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: LEARNING CULTURE	
Author(s): DAVID J JONES	
Corporate Source: AERC CONFERENCE	Publication Date: 2001

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: D.J. Jones Dr.	Printed Name/Position/Title: D. J. JONES, SENIOR LECTURER in AD. Ed.
Organization/Address: University of Nottingham	Telephone: +44 115 951520 FAX: +44 115 958367
	E-Mail Address: david.jones@nottingham.ac.uk Date: 18 March 03

21-MAR-2003 10:51 FROM TO 9-00161429212560 P.02